

THE AENEID, AN EPIC OF LOVE

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## OUTLINE

- I. Love themes in the Aeneid
- II. The Odyssean Aeneid (I-VI)
- III. The Iliadic Aeneid (VII-XII)
- IV. Conclusion

Virgil\* begins his great epic with this basic motif:\*

Book I (1.)

Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena  
carmen, et egressus silvis vicina coegi  
ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono,  
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis  
arma vicumque cano. Troiae qui primus ab oris  
Italiam fato profugus Lavinaque venit  
litora - multum ille et terris jactatus et alto  
vi superum, saevae memorem Junonis ob iram,  
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem  
inferretque deos Latio - genus unde Latinum  
Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.

But the Aeneid is much more than the story of the founding of Rome. Virgil has depicted a canvas which is personal and suffused with a new sensitivity, a moving narrative. He has, very artistically, woven into the story the underlying theme of love, an atmosphere which pervades all life. Viktor Pöschl, in his book The Art of Vergil, says: " The Aeneid has been called the 'epic of grief.' It could as well be called the 'epic of love,' for its deepest tragedy is that its people 'loved too much.' This is true of Euryalus, of whom the poet says (IX. 430): 'Infelicem nimium dilexit amicum'; it is just as true of Juno, Venus, Turnus, Dido and Latinus (XII.29: 'Victus amore tui... vincula omnia rupi'), and of Amata, Laocoon, and Evander. Love is the motivating force in all that Aeneas does." <sup>1</sup>

And in the Aeneid, who can forget the picture of the fall of Troy, with the concentrated pathos of the dual death of Polites before his own father's and Mother's eyes, and of Priam himself upon the steps of the altar? And what is the tremendous machinery of punishment after death which the Sixth Book describes in the most majestic passage of all epic poetry but the measure of Virgil's sense of human guilt, his depth of feeling, and the symbolic significance of his work.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps one might say that the epic is a poem of humanity, a symbol not only of the tragedy in Roman history, but in human life as well or indeed in all nature. For as Peschl contends: "In Vergil the realm of the soul is revealed with a tenderness and delicacy of nuance unrivaled either by Homer, the Classical, or the Hellenistic Greeks."<sup>3</sup>

Virgil's story is that of the creation of an empire, the humbling of opposition by deeds of heroism. But in the eyes of a poet, destiny and the necessities of historical development are seen to be enacted by individuals. And, therefore, human weaknesses and passions, their hopes and dreams are an integral part of the drama.

"The whole of the Aeneid is, in a sense, a descent into the Heart."<sup>4</sup> Love themes - filial, paternal, humanitarian, and also the erotic and conubial - run like a thread throughout the entire epic. Aeneas, who is for Virgil a messianic figure,

the bearer of a sacred trust and the symbol of Rome's dedicated role in man's destiny, is also Virgil's principal figure of humanity and tenderness.<sup>5</sup> We get brief glimpses into the more human aspects of his character in his love for his father and for his son, in his love for Dido, in his fatherly pity for the young warrior Lausus whom he is unwillingly forced to kill.<sup>6</sup> However, these flashes of sentiment and scenes of warmth are by no means limited to the hero alone as we shall discuss later in reviewing the twelve books of the Aeneid.

The scheme of the Aeneid certainly corresponds very closely to the schemes of both the Odyssey and the Iliad, combining as it were, the arrangements of each.<sup>7</sup>

"In the first six books, Aeneas, like Odysseus, is shipwrecked, is directed to Dido's palace by a gracious lady (Venus instead of Nausicaa), relates his adventures at a banquet, remains with a charming hostess (Dido instead of Calypso), visits Hades, encounters a recently deceased comrade who asks to be buried (Palinurus instead of Elpenor), meets an associate who refuses to talk to him (Dido instead of Ajax), is told by another comrade how he was murdered by the connivance of his wife (Deiphobus instead of Agamemnon), and receives a prophecy of the future (from Anchises instead of Teiresias)."<sup>8</sup>

"The last six books correspond to the Iliad, from which comes the battle scenes, the attack on the ships, the catalogue of chiefs, the divinely made arms, the funeral games, the broken truce, the midnight adventure of Nisus and Euryalus (Diomedes and Odysseus), the unsuccessful embassy to Diomedes (Achilles), the quarrel between Turnus and Drances (Agamemnon and Achilles), the slaying of Pallas by Turnus (Patroclus by Hector), the final duel between Aeneas and Turnus (Achilles and Hector)."<sup>9</sup>

With this resumé in mind, we can now proceed to the love motifs which permeate the entire story.

With the unleashing of the storm in Book I, one sees the scheme of fate, the opposition of Juno, the symbolic "furor" with which Aeneas' "pietas" must contend. It is during this storm that Aeneas utters his first words in the whole epic. Words which give us our first insight into his character.

Book I (94)                      O terque quaterque beati,  
                                     quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis  
                                     contigit oppetere! O Danaum fortissime gentis  
                                     Tydide! mene Iliacis occumbere campis  
                                     non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,  
                                     saevus ubi Aeacidae telo jacet Hector, ubi ingens  
                                     Sarpedon, ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis  
                                     scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volvit!

This passage is indeed a transformation of Odysseus' words (Ody. 5. 306), but is it nothing more than just a quotation from Homer? "Odysseus grieves because he must forego glory and burial honors; he does not mention love. Aeneas' wish to have died 'ante ora patrum' expresses not only longing for glory but also for love and warmth of home. The thought that the presence of loved ones blunts the sting of death, is a common motif in the Aeneid."<sup>10</sup> Thus, Dido's death agony is eased by her sister's presence and by the gesture of release with which Juno sends Iris to shorten her suffering. The dying Camilla is assisted by her fellow-in-arms before Diana carries her off. We hear of Aeneas' compassion for Palinurus and of Nisus sacrificing himself for Euryalus. Likewise, the battle deaths of Pallas and Lausus are relieved through Aeneas'

mourning. Turnus and Mezentius die alone but with thoughts of those they love.<sup>11</sup> This is the kind of death which Aeneas prays for, clearly demonstrating his close ties with the dead comrades of his old home.

With the calm, Aeneas reverses his mood and tries to encourage his companions. Moreover, if his first words show his "pietas", his comforting address to his "socii" reveals still another fundamental feature of his character - his "magnitudo animi."<sup>12</sup>

Book I (198) O socii (neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum),  
o passi graviores, dabit deus his quoque finem.  
vos et Scyllaeam rabiem penitusque sonantis  
accestis scopulos, vos et Cyclopa saxa  
experti: revocate animos maestumque timorem  
mittite; forsitan et haec olim meminisse juvabit.  
per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum  
tendimus in Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas  
ostendunt; illic fas regna resurgere Troiae.  
durate, et vosmet rebus servate secundis.

Now he pictures himself looking back at the perils of the past, now he more or less accepts his mission and fate; now he welcomes danger as a challenge rather than a cause of despair.<sup>13</sup> But, little does he know that the real "storm" lies ahead - one that is psychological rather than physical. For though Book I already reveals Dido as the "alter ego" of Aeneas, as one who also has foiled the crime of the past by founding a city of the future, and one who likewise has an object of "pietas", Aeneas suspects nothing of the tragedy to ensue in Book IV.

The second book with which the narrative of the fall of Troy begins is the story of how Aeneas came to leave his Trojan "patria." It is an account of the destruction of all that had made life meaningful to him and its telling is itself - an ordeal. "He appears as a man of memory and of inner vision. In the extremity of death and suffering, the grief burning in his heart breaks out. His speech not only expresses his mortal fear, but also serves to express his character. It allows one a glimpse of his heart and of a basic motif of the poem."<sup>14</sup>

To the hero, Aeneas, the memory of Troy and the hope for Rome are holy obligations, and in their fulfillment he displays "pietas" which is nothing else but doing his duty to gods, country, ancestors and descendants. "Duty" here, however, is not a response to the dictates of reason, but a response to love, and is without the harsh associations evoked by the word."<sup>15</sup>

In his tale, Aeneas reveals that it was not easy at first to persuade him that it was his destiny to abandon Troy for a new "patria." The vision of Hector and Hector's warning to flee and carry off the "penates" had no effect upon him except to arouse him from sleep. But Venus forces him to face reality by showing him the very gods at work in the destruction of Troy and finally convinces her son that there is but one course left him, to rescue his father, wife and son.<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, Anchises urges him to leave and save Creusa



and Ascanius.

Book II (638) 'vos o, quibus integer aevi  
sanguis,' ait, 'solidaeque suo stant robore  
vires,  
vos agitate fugam.'

For though, as he saw, there was some reason for the young, the strong and the fit to escape, there was none for him. He was old and useless. The only possible way to convince Anchises that he was not deserting his "patria" was to enlist his loyalty to a new one.<sup>17</sup> The wonderful portent of the blaze afire over Julius' head accomplished this and also established Anchises, the weak old man, as the vessel of salvation; and Ascanius, the innocent child, as the instrument of prophecy.<sup>18</sup>

The picture of Aeneas carrying Anchises on his shoulders with Anchises holding in his hands the sacred household gods and Ascanius tagging along side his father is appealing, but Creusa only follows behind and somehow gets lost along the way. The symbolism here is clear. Not yet realizing the significance of this event, however, the loss of Creusa immediately compels Aeneas to leave Ascanius and Anchises and return in blind grief and fury to the very centre of Troy and the midst of the battle. Then Creusa's "flitting shade" appears to him and speaks:

Book II (776) quid tantum insano iuvat indulgere dolori,  
O dulcis coniunx? non haec sine numine divum  
eveniunt; nec te hinc comitem asportare Creusam

fas, aut ille sinit superi regnator Olympi.  
 longa tibi exsilia et vastum maris aequor  
 arandum,  
 et terram Hesperiam venies, ubi Lydius arva  
 inter opima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris:  
 illic res laetae regnumque et regia coniunx  
 parata tibi; lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae.  
 non ego Myrmidonum sedes Dolopumve superbas  
 aspiciam aut Graeis servitum matribus ibo,  
 Dardanis et divae Veneris nurus;  
 sed me magna deum genetrix his detinet oris,  
 iamque vale et nati serva communis amorem.

With these words "no more tears," Creusa surrenders her husband to a future she cannot share; she visualizes his glorious mission and the heritage of their son and also prophecies for him a new and royal wife. Truly, this is indeed a sacrificing love: a resignation to fate and a "letting go" of one so dear which is a terrible renunciation even in the face of death.

Book II (792)

ter conatus ibi collo dare bracchia circum;  
 ter frustra compressa manus effugit imago,  
 par levibus ventis volucrique simillima somno.

Aeneas, on the other hand, is wrought with grief under this great ordeal. His fate is to sacrifice every present enjoyment or satisfaction to an end he can never hope to witness himself. The emotional center of his whole life has come to a close with the destruction of Troy. The curtain has been drawn, and a new, unknown and even dreaded goal awaits.

Uncertainty, doubt and the sense of an endless quest for

an elusive goal constitutes the peculiar atmosphere of Book III. The weariness and soul-searching which Aeneas must undergo is, in some respects, more horrible than even the comprehensible emotional fear of immediate dangers such as the Harpies, Polyphemus, Scylla and Charybdis. But therein lies the main interest in the terrors of the journey - the deepening spiritual sorrow which Aeneas feels as he begins more and more to realize the importance and greatness of his mission.<sup>19</sup>

In Book III Aeneas and Anchises piously placate the restless spirit of Polydorus by burial rites; and Aeneas once more displays his compassion when he encounters Andromache at the waters of a second Simois sacrificing to an "empty" grave of Hector.<sup>20</sup> But the main tragedy of the third book is the death of Aeneas' loving father, the symbol of his conscience, his duty, his "pietas."<sup>21</sup> Aeneas grieves in this hour of desolation and peril. Because now he is truly left alone to confront the horrors of his elusive and terrible journey.

#### Book III (708)

'hic pelagi tot tempestatibus actus  
heu, genitorem, omnis curae casusque levamen,  
amitto Anchisen, hic me, pater optime, fessum  
deseris, heu, tantis nequiquam erepte periclis!  
nec vates Helenus, cum multa horrenda moneret,  
hos mihi praedixit luctus, non dira Celaeno.  
hic labor extremus, longarum haec meta viarum.  
hinc me digressum vestris deus appulit oris.'

As Norman Dewitt once wrote: "Personal suffering has

begun to furnish a key to the mysteries of the life of man...  
The present finds itself reflected in the past."<sup>22</sup>

Book III concluded with the death of Anchises. Book IV takes up the action where it was left at the close of the first book. Now the theme of feminine attraction which was only hinted at in Homer's Calypso, Circe, and Nausicaa, is elevated into tragedy in the figure of Dido.<sup>23</sup>

"The love of Dido and Aeneas is prepared with great psychological insight and told with great delicacy; both are widowed exiles yearning to strike new roots. We are quite ready to believe that they would fall in love without the elaborate substitution of Cupid for Ascanius. The consummation of the love, Aeneas' divinely directed desertion, Dido's confidence to her sister Anna, and her suicide are told in the highly dramatic Book IV."<sup>24</sup>

Poschl states: "In the Aeneid, as in most tragedies, everything aims toward the tragic end from the start so that nothing else can be expected."<sup>25</sup> Upon Dido's first entrance, the distant future is shown as already touched with tragedy. The stage is set. Dido and Aeneas unknowingly play into the hands of fate. It is interesting to note here that Venus' blind affection for Aeneas causes the passion in Dido that could have had such disastrous consequences for her son.<sup>26</sup>

Dido speaking to her sister at the beginning of the book, resists the love she feels for Aeneas because of her "pietas" to her dead husband. She solemnly exclaims:

Book IV (20)

Anna, fatebor enim, miseri post fata Sychaei  
 conjugis et sparsos fraterna caedo penatis  
 solus hic inflexit sensus animumque labantem  
 impulit. agnosco veteris vestigia flammae.  
 sed mihi vel tellus optem prius ima dehiscat  
 vel pater omnipotens abigat me fulmine ad umbras,  
 pallentis umbras Erebo noctemque profundam,  
 ante, pudor, quam te violo aut tua iura resolve.  
 ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores  
 abstulit; ille habent secum servetque sepulcro.

Here Anna encourages the very passion that Dido is trying to control. But "Anna is not the lascivious insinuator found in the Attic drama. She is not the Euripidean nurse, no Menandrian confidante. Her first words are those of a tender loving sister: O luce magis dilecti sorori... She engenders the idea in Dido's already loving heart that the exposed kingdom needs a protector and that only Aeneas can bring about the real greatness of Carthage."<sup>27</sup>

Book IV (47)

quam tu urbem, soror, hanc cernes, quae surgere regna  
 coniugo tali! Teucrum comitantibus armis  
 Punica se quantis attollet gloria rebus!

The conversation with Anna releases the full force of feeling in Dido's enamored heart. And she "drinks draughts of love" enchained by the ever-tightening bonds of love which are soon to ensnare her. "Little Ascanius", the first object of her

affection, strengthens the affection and desire which is burning in her for him and through him - his father.

Juno's jealous love for Carthage and Venus' overy concern drive Aeneas and Dido to deepen their relationship by a complete consummation of their love in the ecstatic and passionate embrace of sexual pleasure; a fact which only intensifies the tragedy to come. For soon Aeneas comes to realize that he must renounce this prohibited love though with painful resignation. "He says in effect: 'I cannot possibly say all that is in me to say. I can never repay you. I shall never, never forget you. In brief, I can only plead as excuse (1) that I never undertook or promised marriage with you, (2) that if I had had my own way, I would have stopped at Troy and rebuilt it. But Apollo and the fates send me on to Italy: that is now my only possible 'patria'. If you have your own city, why cannot I have mine? I too have the right to seek a home beyond the seas. Further, I cannot stay: my father haunts me in my dreams, my boy Ascanius is being deprived of his rights; finally Jupiter has warned me by his own messenger. I saw the god himself in the plain light of day! I heard the very voice! Don't then detain me any longer. It is not by choice that I go to Italy.' There is nothing in this speech that is not technically correct. But it is delivered to one who has no use for technicalities."<sup>28</sup>

For the greater the love known, the greater the emptiness;  
 the greater the emptiness, the greater the need to love again.  
 The feelings of rejection bring with it not only despair and  
 loneliness but also disillusionment and disappointment. No  
 words can express the pain of too much tenderness or the wound  
 of one's own understanding of love being destroyed. The lover's  
 wish is "let this night never end."<sup>29</sup> Or as Horace puts it: (ODES)

Book I (13)

felices ter et amplius  
 quos irrupta tenet copula nec malis  
 divulsus querimoniis  
 suprema citius solvet amor die.

Old clichés like - "It is better to have loved and lost,  
 than never to have loved at all." - offer no consolation to a  
 soul distraught with heartbreak. A sensitive love is the very  
 life of life, for yesterday's love is already a dream, and  
 tomorrow can only be a vision of hope. Only in mutual love is  
 there a sense of feeling, of satisfaction. Unrequited love soon  
 becomes a burden and the only real escape from such present  
 suffering is the path of death.<sup>30</sup> The queen's pride, self-  
 respect, her sense of dignity, and thirst for revenge all demand  
 her death. The very character of Dido demands that she not seek  
 death because of lost love, but because of the consciousness of  
 her deep fall.<sup>31</sup> The pendulum of her fate has swung from the  
 faith and honor that she once held for her dead husband to the

shame of her lust; from the proud dignity and royal splendor of her first entrance to the worst humiliation; from joy to the deepest sadness, from warm humanity to cruel hatred, from royal diligence to neglect of her duty, from the near-completion of a great kingdom to its utter destruction.<sup>32</sup> The immensity of Dido's tragedy is mirrored in the shattering reversal of her "pietas", "maiestas", and "dignitas" to the guilt she feels toward her husband, her mission, her reputation and her people.

The vacillation between love and hate, union and destruction dominates the whole narrative. Dido tries three times to alter fate: once when imploring Aeneas to stay, another by Anna's entreaties, and then in the monologue of the last tortured night before his departure when she considers the possibility of following her beloved.<sup>33</sup> "Every check she encounters leads her back to the death decision. The threat of self-destruction and revenge comes after her imploring words. The preparation of the funeral pyre follows the rebuff of Anna's entreaties. The resolution 'to die as you deserve' replaces the thought of accompanying the hero."<sup>34</sup>

Death is the only answer as nothing can save her own ego, self-respect, and her prominent glory. Death provides not only the escape from her suffering and a deliverance from unbearable pain, but also a self-imposed atonement and the restitution of



the "great image" which she wanted to leave to posterity.<sup>35</sup>

"Thus dies Dido on her love bed placed on the pyre, with the sword of Aeneas in her heart, a majestic queen, acknowledging the unbreakable bond of love even in the act of dying."<sup>36</sup> Once again she is a queen as in the beginning - greater and more glorious than ever. "On the whole, the contrast between Aeneas's coolness and Dido's ardor is the original tragic contract between man and woman."<sup>37</sup>

Dido's experience is destiny willed by divine forces, an event of world history, and a link in the chain of Roman "fata." Besides destroying her own existence, it also produces ruin far beyond her personal fate by putting an end to the existence of Carthage which she symbolizes.<sup>38</sup> When Dido, upon being refused, hurls her curse at the hero, she unwittingly also forecasts the bitter enmity between Carthage and Rome.

#### Book IV (621)

'haec precor, hanc vocem extremam cum sanguine fundo.  
tum vos, O Tyrii, stirpem et genus omne futurum  
exercete odiis, cinerique haec mittite nostro  
munera. nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt.  
exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor,  
qui face Dardanios ferroque sequare colonos  
nunc, olim, quocumque dabunt se tempore vires.  
litora litoribus contraria, fluctibus undas  
imprecor, arma armis; pugnent ipsique nepotesque.

Aeneas, on the other hand, sees that he has been false to his father, his mission, his men and especially to the destiny of his young son. Thereby his contrition is probably very sincere. Dido is a tragic heroine, while Aeneas remains a hero of duty.

For while the Carthaginian queen violates her duty, Aeneas remains faithful to his, even though he does forget it temporarily. The real tragedy of Book IV, in the last analysis, is the transformation of so great a love into a bitter and unrelenting hatred.

The descriptive scenes in Book V are a refreshing break from the calamity which has just occurred. But even here, there is an undertone of foreboding in the present joy and gaiety of the funeral games.

The book begins with Aeneas out at sea glancing back toward the flames of Dido's pyre. He, at this stage of the plot, only suspects the truth and certainly has no idea of the depth and extent of Dido's tragedy. Next follows the interlude of a relaxed atmosphere, a simple memorial on the anniversary of Anchises' death. Then come the games whose playful surroundings symbolize the background of bloody wars to come. The fact that during the course of the games the sacrifice is never actually forced to the point of the destruction of human life is what separates the games from the principal narrative of the Aeneid, where death is the constant tragic condition.<sup>39</sup> The irony of the contests is enhanced by the youthfulness and discipline of the participants, a parody of the actualities of war which are to follow.<sup>40</sup>

The foot-race, especially, which is dominated by the affection of Nisus for Euryalus, although a delightful picture,

cannot but arouse melancholy thoughts of their tragedy to come. "In this sense, then, the games form a world apart. They are enclosed within the world of ritual which takes the story out of the violence of life and then, once more, leads back to it."<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, the death of Palinurus in the postlude of the book strikes a sombre note of reality. Neptune demands one life before Aeneas can continue on his journey.<sup>42</sup> Palinurus is the sacrifice that assures Aeneas' safe arrival at the gate of Avernus. In another sense, Palinurus' death signifies that Aeneas' long ocean voyage has reached its goal; the faithful helmsman is no longer needed.<sup>43</sup>

The theme of death and resurrection is the focus in Book VI. Aeneas must visit the depths of Avernus and, seeking out his father, learn the subsequent history of his race and of the city his descendants will establish.<sup>44</sup>

The heartbreaking fatherly love of Daedalus for Icarus, which is depicted in the beginning of this book, seems to reflect Aeneas' longing to meet his own father again.<sup>45</sup> Both are examples of the deep "pietas" that binds together those who are separated.<sup>46</sup>

There are two conditions for success in this ordeal which Aeneas is about to undertake, the mysterious journey of life

into death; a passport, the golden-bough that only "he who is fated" can pluck; and the "hiacula" (sacrifice of black cattle) that Aeneas must perform for his comrade Misenus whose sudden death has polluted the whole fleet. This being fulfilled, Aeneas begins his descent.

The ordeals which confront Aeneas while in the underworld are symbolic of Virgil's experience of the tragedy of life. <sup>47</sup>

Aeneas' first nightmarish encounter is that of mythological Hades, horrible personifications - Senectus, Metus, Fames, Egestas - and the traditional monsters: Centaurs, Chimaeras, Gorgons and Harpies. This is really much like the dream world of the third book: it is dangerous only to him who just thinks it is. <sup>48</sup> Lucretius says: (De Rerum Natura)

Book III (87)

nam veluti pueri trepidant atque omnia caecis  
in tenebris metuunt, sic nos in luce timemus  
interdum, nihilo quae sunt metuenda maxis quam  
quae pueris in tenebris navitant finguntque futura.

Undaunted Aeneas presses onward but soon pathetic compassion overwhelms him when he encounters the human guilt, suffering and atonement of the sorrowful souls condemned to eternal perdition. He is temporarily overcome by the pathos of the young and unburied dead and is "struck dumb" by the stern law of the underworld:

Book VI (331)

constitit Anchisa satus et vestigia pressit  
multa putans sortemque animo miseratus iniquam.

Then unbelievably he comes upon the flitting soul of  
Dido hiding in the shadows.

Book VI (456)

'infelix Dido, verus mihi nuntius ergo  
venerat extinctam ferroque extrema secutam?  
funeris heu tibi causa fui? per sidera juro,  
per superos et si qua fides tellure sub ima est,  
invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi.  
sed me jussa deum, quae nunc has ire per umbras,  
per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam,  
imperiis egere suis; nec credere quivi  
hunc tantum tibi me discessu ferre dolorem  
siste gradum teque aspectu ne subtrahe nostro  
quem fugis? extremum fato quod te adloquor  
hoc est.

These words as well as his tears convey the feelings of a  
man who cannot quite believe his own eyes nor accept the  
sudden removal of doubt of what he has feared yet not known for  
sure.<sup>40</sup> Now for the first time he realizes what he had done.  
He tries to explain but to no avail. Dido withdraws back into  
the arms of her first and reassuring lover with whom she has  
been forever rejoined. Aeneas can only follow with weeping  
eyes: the encounter is brief because she will not let it be  
prolonged.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Aeneas meets his father Anchises who burst out  
with joy:

Book VI (687)

venisti tandem, tuaque exspectata parenti  
vicit iter durum pietas? datur ora tueri,

nate, tua et notas audire et reddere voces?  
 sic equidem ducebam animo rebarque futurum  
 tempora dinumerans, nec me mea cura fefellit.  
 quas ego te terras et quanta per aequora vectum  
 accipio! quantis jactatum, nate, periclis!  
 quam metui ne quid Libyae tibi regna nocerent!'

In his revelation , which is the turning point of all the uncertainty that precedes it, Anchises points toward a new and glorious future - the empire that was to be Rome. But likewise in his prophecy, he unfolds the dismal realization that the tragedies that happen in the past will happen eternally.<sup>51</sup> Virgil's poem is not life, but therein lies its value, for it reveals the tragedy of life and in this sombre tale we may find something of our own tragedy, the sadness of human existence.<sup>52</sup>

#### Book VII (43)

maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo,  
 maius opus moveo.

This is the theme which sets the stage for the second half of the book - the Iliadic Aeneid. From now on Aeneas is no longer engaged in an inner conflict or struggle, but in a great war with tangible human opponents.

"The description of the bloody battles of the last third of the poem raises a question of how Virgil could manage a task seemingly so foreign to his artistic sensibilities and, for that matter, to his whole personality. The unsentimental, harsh realism of the killing and fighting in the Iliad is the sphere

in which Homer diverges the most from the concept of Classical art as directed toward a goal of harmonious beauty. Yet, after all, realism is necessary as 'materia gloriae' for Aeneas and as symbol of the bloody history of Rome. The horrors of war had to be shown. The extent of the suffering and the power of the passions in this dimension of life had to be shown also so that the strength and glory of Rome might shine all the more in juxtaposition.

Over and above his delicacy and tenderness, Virgil was a Roman. In Aeneas' hard heroism and humanity, unbending firmness is tempered with mildness; Dido alternates between harsh pride and glowing abandon; hard and soft traits are evenly distributed throughout the whole poem."<sup>53</sup>

In the Iliadic Aeneid, Aeneas' humanity is never exercised at the expense of his "pietas." He fights well because he feels it is his duty, yet he fights without the violence and cupidity that makes war an end in itself.<sup>54</sup>

The war is a terrible war. Yet even so Virgil portrays the enemies of Aeneas as people too.<sup>55</sup> The poet presents Turnus as demoniacal, but not evil. Turnus fights for Italy, for Lavinia and for what he believes to be his birthright. Here again is an example of "too much loving." It is evident thus far that whatever Virgil wishes to portray - war, peace, love, hate - the human sympathy and tenderness of his appeal to the world is

all his own.<sup>56</sup>

There are two moving, dramatic scenes in Book VIII. The first is that of the goddess Venus still fulfilling her role as mother of Aeneas - protecting and shielding her child, ring from danger as always.

The second episode is that of Evander's fatherly advice and concern for his youthful son going into battle (358-585). The presence of Aeneas at this striking display of emotion between father and son leads us to believe that he is indeed aware of his new responsibility towards his relationship with Pallas and Evander.<sup>57</sup>

The principal love motif which plays on the heartstrings in Book IX is that symbolic foreshadowing which the games in Book V represented - namely the tender and compassionate episode of Nisus and Euryalus.

Both Nisus and Euryalus are not clear-cut characters in their own right so much as types of youthful devotion and sacrifice.<sup>58</sup> In turn the devotion of Nisus and his tragic grief is itself a forecast of the affection and grief of Aeneas for Pallas.<sup>59</sup>

Virgil's carefully arrangement of this event is displayed with dramatic force and pathos.



## Book IX (390)

'Euryale infelix, qua te regione reliqui?  
quave sequar?'

Then the anxiety of having been separated from his friend is replaced by the more dreadful fear of losing him in death:

## Book IX (425)

conclamat Nisus nec se celare tenebris  
amplius aut tantum potuit perferre dolorem.  
'me, me, adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum,  
O Rutuli! mea fraus omnis, nihil isto nec ausus  
nec potuit; caelum hoc et conscia sidera testor';  
- tantum infelicem nimium dilexit amicum.

The poet in these few lines describes the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice for one's fellow man. Here again is the recurring theme of 'too much loving.' This is also emphasized in the hardships of a mother's sorrow. A mother's love which of its very nature demands sacrifice and pain:

## Book IX (481)

'hunc ego te, Euryale, aspicio? tune ille senectae  
sera meae requies, potuisti linguere solam crudelis?

It is interesting to note the comparison between Euryalus and Aeneas. Both hurt those they cherish most - it is those who love us who are most sensitive and concerned for our welfare. But one does so because of his rash boldness, the other because of his devotion to a higher morality.

In the next book, Aeneas returns from his mission to form alliances, and all but wins the war. This great reversal of tide of events is motivated by human feeling, by Aeneas' "pietas" toward Pallas, whom Turnus has so cruelly slain.

"Here one senses how deeply the poet is affected by the bitterness of war; beneath Aeneas' grief for Pallas flashes a greater tragedy of which his friend's death is only one instance symbolizing the long procession of dead to follow him. 60

Aeneas is not driven by battle-lust or the mere wish for military glory. Fighting is not a satisfaction but a bitter fulfillment of duty for him. The unsheathing of his sword requires the stimulus of great grief and worry. 61 In a broad sense, it is Aeneas' attitude toward friends and foes in this book that win him on the side of both morality and fate.

This is especially evident when Aeneas, even in his moment of frustration and grief over Pallas' death, tries in vain to warn off Lausus from engaging him in battle. But the strings are cut and Lausus' devoted filial love compels him to enter this suicidal match.

Book X (811)

'quo moriture ruis maioraque viribus audes?  
fallit te incautum pietas tua.'

Lausus, of course, presses on and Aeneas is now forced to fight. Yet when he turns to look at his victim's body, "pale in death," his anger melts into compassion.

Book X (821)

at vero ut vultum vidit morientis et ora,  
ora modis Anchisiades pallentia miris,  
ingemuit miserans graviter dextramque tetendit,  
et mentem patriae subiit pietatis imago.

Aeneas' first thought now is to do what he can for such filial devotion and nobility:

Book X (825)

'quid tibi nunc, miserande puer, pro laudibus istis,  
quid plus Aeneas tanta dabit indole dignum?  
arma, quibus lactatus, habe tua; teque parentum  
manibus et cineri, si qua est ea cura, remitto.  
hoc tamen infelix miseram solabere mortem:  
Aeneae magni contra cadis'

All he can actually do, however, is to hand the body unspiled to Lausus' companions and thus return it to the shades and ashes of his ancestors.

Mazentius himself, has been driven to recognition of his crime and of the only possible satisfaction yet left him, he then accepts death willingly.<sup>62</sup> Aeneas, of course, cannot spare this "deathbed repentance."<sup>63</sup>

The eleventh book is the bridge between the decisive battle of Book X and the final victory in Book XII. Once more Virgil's insight into human tenderness can be seen by his description and narrative of Aeneas at the bier of Pallas (Bk, XI 1-99) and Evander's mourning for his beloved son, a young warrior now become a man in his death.

Book XI (148)

at non Evandrum potis est vis ulla tenere,  
sed venit in medias. feretro Pallante reposito  
procubuit super atque haeret lacrimansque gemensque...

"No power could hold him back," just as no expression can amply describe his inconsolable woe.

The story now brings us to Camilla - whose romantic upbringing in the wilds introduces her as a true child of nature. "She is at once simple and terrible, naive and ferocious. Her easy deception by Arruns' son and her fierce revenge upon him, illustrate admirably the two sides of her nature. Her self-confidence, her defiant exposure of the breast, her rusticity, her 'cupido caedis', her femininity - all combine to make her an easy prey for the sly Arruns. But in defeat she is utterly self-forgetful, concerned only for Turnus and the war. Her faults are clearly less than those of her leader - her death once more brings out his responsibility for such useless sacrifice of noble life. Virgil, as clearly as he knew how, has shown the tragedy of 'civil' war and the 'humanitas' that looks beyond the battle lines to peace."<sup>64</sup>

The previous scenes of passionate involvement in the last half of the book all lead up to the death of Turnus in the final episode of the epic. Even though Turnus is an enemy and the last opposition which Aeneas must overcome in order to fulfill his mission, Virgil still portrays him as a man of heroic nobility. For it is just through the wiles of Allecto that he falls prey to the forces of Hell.<sup>65</sup> Turnus and Dido are both tragic figures. Both have fallen into tragic guilt by divine interference; both are filled with a love of glory that lends grandeur to their

catastrophes with which they are caught up in a fatal passion.<sup>66</sup>

The higher level of "humanitas", the Roman manner and way of thinking, the inner discipline and feeling for the sanctity of law - all these distinguish Aeneas from Turnus and are the necessary consequence of a higher morality.<sup>67</sup>

Aeneas' high sense of "humanitas" almost wins out in his willingness to spare the conquered general because of his plea toward his father Daunus:

Book XII (931)

'equidem merui nec deprecor' inquit;  
'utere sorte tua. miseri te si qua parentis  
tangere cura potest, oro (fuit et tibi talis  
Anchises genitor) Dauni miserere senectae  
et me, seu corpus spoliatum lumine navis,  
redde meis. vicisti et victum tendere palmas  
Ausonii videre; tua est Lavinia coniunx,  
ulterius ne tende odiis."

In the end, Aeneas decides that Turnus must pay for his past crime; it was too late for Turnus to receive mercy, he who had shown no mercy to Pallas. Moreover, Aeneas, as Pallas' destined avenger, had an obligation that greatly overshadowed any "humanitas" he might wish to show toward his beaten foe.<sup>68</sup> With Turnus' death, the union of two peoples and the foundation of Rome was established.

Virgil's story has ended, but its legend lives on. He had created an 'ideology' of an empire, the inspiration of his theme. The poet sincerely believed that Rome represented the

goal of all historical activity and was the only hope of peace, social order, and humane behavior associated with strong government.<sup>69</sup>

But that is only one aspect of the Aeneid and of Virgil. He also envisioned the ideal Roman endowed with the Roman cardinal virtues of "pietas", "humanitas", and "magnitudo animi" - all expressions different degrees of love. "He prefigured the Christian hero, whose heart remains gentle through struggle and sorrow and beats in secret sympathy with all suffering creatures."<sup>70</sup> This is a direct parallel to Poschl's statement: "The grief that Aeneas bears and conquers is, I repeat, less sorrow for his own loss or denied happiness than sympathy and compassion for others who must suffer bitterly for the sake of the command laid on him by destiny."<sup>71</sup>

However, perhaps the most remarkable fact about the poem is its treatment of the victims.<sup>72</sup> There are tears for Dido, for Nisus and Euryalus, for Camilla, for Mezentius and Turnus - all those who must pay the penalty for their excesses. There are also tears for Pallas, Lausus, Evander - all who are examples of a much higher order of self-sacrifice. They must also die. Aeneas is the hero because he looks beyond such tragedy to a peace that somehow may overcome it - a peace of harmony, human understanding, love.<sup>73</sup>

"The words of Dehmel: 'to be a poet means to embrace the world in love and lift it up to God; apply to Virgil more than to anyone else.'" If poetry is love, then the AENEID is the epic of love.

## FOOTNOTES

- \* Some scholars prefer to spell it VERGIL
- + All Latin quotes are taken from Hutzal, Fredericus J.,  
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- 3 Poschl, p. 3.
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- 9 Hadas, Moses, p. 155.
- 10 Poschl, p. 34.
- 11 Ibid., p. 34.
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- 36 Ibid., p. 89.
- 37 Ibid., p. 47.
- 38 Ibid., p. 74.
- 39 Ibid., p. 65.
- 40 Ibid., p. 66.
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- 44 Putnam, p. 92.
- 45 Poschl, p. 150.
- 46 Ibid., p. 150.
- 47 Poschl, p. 51.
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- 50 Ibid., p. 294.
- 51 Musurillo, p. 121.
- 52 Ibid., p. 121.
- 53 Poschl, p. 100.
- 54 Otis, p. 316.
- 55 Poschl, p. 94.
- 56 Mayor, p. 40.
- 57 Otis, p. 340.
- 58 Ibid., p. 388.
- 59 Ibid., p. 350.
- 60 Poschl, p. 50.
- 61 Otis, p. 515.
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- 63 Ibid., p. 360.
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- 65 Poschl, p. 92.
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67 Ibid., p. 123.

68 Otis, p. 380.

69 Ibid., p. 389.

70 Poschl, p. 53.

71 Ibid., p. 53.

72 Otis, p. 391.

73 Ibid., p. 393.

74 Poschl, p. 94.

75 Otis, p. 394.

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